The Genius Of The *Dragon Ball* Manga

By Brian Ashcraft · Published September 14, 2017 · Comments (112)

It's not just the characters who make *Dragon Ball* so great. It's not just the stories that they tell. It's also the way Akira Toriyama lays out the manga. It's truly wonderful. Here's why.

Website *Nikaidorenji* provided a look at how logical the *Dragon Ball* manga flows. (*Dragon Ball* is certainly not alone in this regard, as many wonderful manga—as well as Western comics and graphic novels—have a good visual flow to pull readers in.) This is nuts and bolts stuff, but it show Toriyama's visual storytelling flair.

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Before looking at the example, it's necessary to note that Japanese manga are read right to left, instead of left to right. Yes, some of you might know this. Some might not.

On this page, you can see Goku tripping King Chappa, with a loud smack (ばしっ). Then, King Chappa falls to the ground with a thud (どでっ). Goku then puts his foot to ground with a thump (とん). One of the other characters then says, "You've left your legs wide open!"

Nikaidorenji breaks down the visual flow, pointing out that the action moves in a reverse Z-direction. It's incredibly simple, and visually it makes sense. Be aware that Toriyama doesn't always use this Z-pattern, but he is quite skilled at moving the eye around the page in a way that makes sense.

The brilliant simplicity is even more evident when the original manga is reorganized. Twitter Kakashiasa breaks the page down even further by flipping the direction of Goku and King Chappa as well as dividing the third panel into two. The text is unchanged, however.

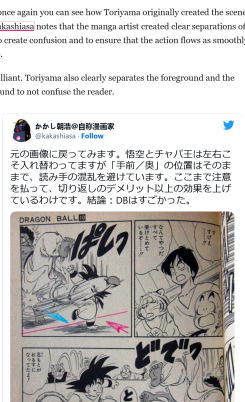
The action certainly does *not* flow, because the added panel creates a separation of space and time. The text also feels jumbled, and the tempo is all mucked up.

But how important is the location of the text? Here, Kakashiasa removes the added panel, enabling the scene to once again play out in the same space. The text, however, is moved.

Yet, the flow of the sounds is all wrong. The eye first goes to the sound Goku makes when his foot hits the ground, then the dialogue box about leaving one's legs wide open, and then the sound of King Chappa hitting the ground. The scene unfolds in an entirely different manner.

Below, once again you can see how Toriyama originally created the scene. This time, Kakashiasa notes that the manga artist created clear separations of space as not to create confusion and to ensure that the action flows as smoothly as possible.

See? Brilliant. Toriyama also clearly separates the foreground and the background to not confuse the reader.



Toriyama is able to focus the reader's eyes in logical ways are a huge part of what makes him such a great manga artist.

This seems so obvious, but that's because Toriyama does it so well and because Kakashiasa and *Nikaidorenji* give excellent explanations.

If you want to learn more about how Toriyama layouts out his manga, the best place to learn is the manga itself. Pick up a copy of *Dragon Ball*, if you're interested.

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